

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
REMOVAL OF NAVIGATION HAZARDS
IN
NEW ENGLAND WATERS

Department of the Army
New England Division, Corps of Engineers
January 1980

The purpose of this overall review of the impacts on the human environment associated with removal of navigational obstructions is prompted by the fact that although different hazards must be dealt with periodically by the New England Division, environmental impacts associated with the removal procedure do not vary significantly. Based on this fact, it is logical that an assessment covering all of the New England Division potential obstruction removal impacts could be described in one document. This approach is also endorsed by the C.E.Q. Guidelines which encourages this type of comprehensive document.

1. General Project Description.

In order to maintain safe navigation conditions in New England waterways, obstructions such as rocks, sunken vessels, obsolete pile structures, etc., must occasionally be removed. Rock Removal is generally accomplished by drilling and blasting. However, depending on the size and depth of the rock, other alternatives may be considered more practical.

Sunken vessel removal may be carried out in several ways, also depending on the size, depth, and condition of the vessel. Cutting or blasting is usually required prior to removal by clamshell dredge. If the vessel is extensively corroded with rust, then the obstruction may be removed by ripping.

Rock obstructions, once drilled, blasted, and removed may be suitable for construction or fill purposes.

2. Locations of Potential Obstructions.

Navigable waterways extend from Eastport, Maine to the New York-Connecticut border on Long Island Sound and along inland rivers. Obstructions interfering with navigation in any of these areas would require prompt action and removal, in order to restore safe navigational conditions. Authorization for such work comes under the River and Harbor Act of 1899.

3. Historical-Archaeological Resources.

In compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, (P.L. 89-665) and Executive Order 11593, coordination with State and local historic commissions will be contacted to determine if potential historic or archaeological resources are involved. Appropriate mitigation actions will be undertaken in such a case.

4. Removal Impacts.

Environmental impacts associated with the removal of navigational obstructions are not significant in terms of plants and animals, because of the localized nature of these obstructions. These

projects often deal with relatively small areas, depending on the size of the rock, vessel, etc., to be removed. Blasting may destroy some organisms in the immediate vicinity of the obstruction, as well as cause a minor temporary increase in turbidity in the water column. Attempts will be made to clear the area of finfish prior to blasting by detonating a small charge. This should significantly reduce the number of fish mortalities. Any plant or animal life living on, in, or under the obstruction may be dislodged or destroyed. The most significant impact relates to the restoration of a safer human environment for those who utilize the waters in the vicinity.

5. Conclusions.

The following points were considered in making the determination that removal of navigational obstructions represents an insignificant impact on the environment and that a detailed Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

a. Removal activities are directed toward restoring safe navigation conditions to the waterway. Therefore, impacts created during removal operations are of a temporary nature.

b. Benthic organisms and other marine life should become reestablished in the project area once removal activities are completed.

c. Considering the social well-being and safety of people affected by the navigational obstruction, the work required to remove such a hazard is a necessity. No action in such cases will allow for possible mishaps to occur which may:

1. Endanger life
2. Increase the loss of property
3. Increase the possibility of groundings and oil or other chemical spills.

d. From an economic standpoint, use of the waterways is essential to the economic well-being of commercial shipping, fishing and recreational boating interests.

Therefore, based on the available information, removal projects would have little or no affect on the biology or aesthetic values at the work areas. Obstruction removal will be of great benefit to the commercial shippers, fishermen, recreational boaters, marinas and others. The environmental effects have been considered and are minimal. It is believed that the total public interest would be served by the removal of these obstructions.

Findings of No Significant Impact

The proposed removal of navigational hazards in New England will entail the removal of various obstructions (rocks, vessels, piles, etc.) from waterways maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers, New England Division. Alternatives for obstruction removal are discussed and the environmental impacts associated with this type of project have been reviewed and presented in the Environmental Assessment.

The Army Corps of Engineers has made the determination that the proposed obstruction removal project will not have any significant impacts which would necessitate the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.

4 January 1980
Date

Max B. Scheider
MAX B. SCHEIDER
Colonel Corps of Engineers
Division Engineer